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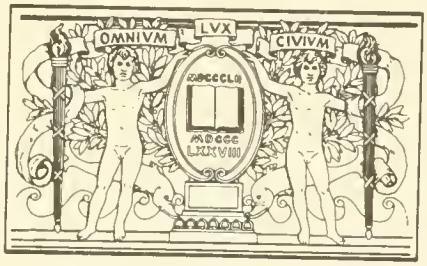

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BOSTON REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

The Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) has sole responsibility for urban renewal and planning activities in the City of Boston. The Authority was established in September 1957 to carry out urban renewal activities in accordance with Chapter 121 of the Massachusetts General Laws, as amended by Chapter 150, Acts of 1957. It received its certificate of organization from the Secretary of the Commonwealth on October 4, 1957.

The planning function was assumed in 1960 when the City Planning Board was abolished and its staff transferred to the BRA, under Chapter 652, Acts of 1960 (M.G.L. Ch. 121A). The functions, duties and responsibilities for general city planning and development were thus combined in one agency, the BRA.

Under the provisions of the National Housing Act of 1949, as amended, the Federal Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD) is authorized to enter into contracts with local redevelopment authorities such as the BRA to finance slum clearance, urban renewal projects, open space, urban beautification and other programs designed to prevent the spread of urban blight through rehabilitation and conservation measures and to improve the quality of the urban environment.

The most common form of urban renewal financing is one in which the local government provides one-third of the net cost of undertaking a project and the Federal government, through HUD, provides the other two-thirds. In Massachusetts, the local share is split between the state and the municipality, making Boston's share one-sixth of the total. The city's share usually takes the form of public improvements.

Amendments to Chapter 121 of the General Laws provide authority for local communities to carry out urban renewal without Federal aid.

The Boston Redevelopment Authority is a semi-autonomous body consisting of five board members. Four members are appointed by the mayor, with city council approval, and one is appointed by the governor of Massachusetts. Board members serve staggered five year terms, with one member's term expiring each year over a five year cycle. The terms of appointment do not coincide with the terms of the mayor (four years) or the governor (four years). Board members are not required by statute to be representative of any particular interest groups, unlike the old City Planning Board, although unions have traditionally been represented.

The BRA Board has the power to appoint a Director (formerly called Development Administrator, and traditionally someone nominated by the mayor) to be in charge of planning and development staff and programs. The Board may also appoint supporting staff as it sees fit. The Board meets bi-weekly to discuss and vote on an agenda prepared by the Director for their consideration. All activities of the BRA must have Board approval.